



ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING UZBEK PHONETICS THROUGH DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION IN COGNATE-LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract. This article examines ways to improve the effectiveness of teaching Uzbek phonetics in cognate-language classrooms through differentiated instruction. The purpose of the study is to develop and test a didactic model that supports the stable formation of learners' pronunciation skills, phonemic awareness, and spelling competence in a context of phonological similarity among cognate languages of the Turkic group. The methodology includes a pedagogical experimental design, diagnostic tests, corpus analysis of phonetic errors, and the triangulation of observation and interview data. The scientific novelty of the study lies in integrating differentiation criteria—such as type of interference, sensitivity to phonetic minimal pairs, articulatory complexity, and speech rate—into a staged instructional technology for teaching phonetics. The results show significant positive changes in pronunciation accuracy, phonemic discrimination, and spelling stability.

Keywords: differentiated instruction; cognate-language classrooms; Uzbek phonetics; interference; phonemic awareness; articulation; pronunciation; spelling

In the modern education system, taking learners' individual characteristics into account is regarded as an important pedagogical requirement. This is especially relevant in teaching Uzbek phonetics in cognate-language classrooms, where it is



essential to overcome phonetic errors caused by the influence of learners' mother tongue. A traditional one-size-fits-all approach does not produce effective results for all learners. For this reason, differentiated instruction is understood as organizing teaching in accordance with students' levels of knowledge, interests, and needs.

In today's globalized world, the expansion of multilingual environments has created new demands for education systems. In particular, when teaching Uzbek to audiences speaking cognate languages, phonetic similarity is accompanied by noticeable differences, which often lead to pronunciation errors. Practical observations show that traditional teaching methods do not produce the same level of effectiveness for all learners, because students in one classroom differ in their background knowledge, speech experience, and rate of acquisition. From this perspective, differentiated instruction becomes especially important.

Differentiated instruction is recognized as a pedagogical strategy based on adapting educational content and methods to learners' individual characteristics. This approach is particularly effective in developing phonetic skills.

The phonological similarity of Turkic languages increases initial motivation, but at the same time it makes interference more hidden, persistent, and not always immediately noticeable even to the teacher: a learner may hear a meaning-distinguishing feature, yet still preserve the habitual articulatory pattern of the mother tongue, or may treat spelling analogies based on phonetic similarity as normative. The literature on second-language phonetics highlights such effective directions as increasing phonemic sensitivity, working with minimal pairs, articulatory training, and integrating listening with pronunciation practice. However,



in cognate-language classrooms, applying these approaches with the same intensity to all learners does not guarantee results, because within one group learners differ sharply in the degree of phonetic similarity, speech experience, reliance on written language, and type of interference. Therefore, instead of trying to bring all students to the same point through identical tasks and identical explanations, it becomes necessary to form phonetic competence through different trajectories based on the principles of differentiated instruction. In methods of teaching Uzbek, the phonetics section is usually addressed in connection with spelling and oral speech culture. However, for cognate-language classrooms, special and systematic differentiation criteria and a lesson technology based on them have not been sufficiently developed, while existing recommendations mostly remain at the level of general methodological guidance.

The aim of this study is to develop a didactic model based on differentiated instruction for teaching Uzbek phonetics in cognate-language classrooms, to test it in practice, and to evaluate its effectiveness through indicators of pronunciation, phonemic discrimination, and spelling stability. The objectives were defined as follows: to identify typical forms of phonetic interference among cognate languages; to substantiate differentiation criteria; to create a system of appropriate exercises; to conduct an experimental study; and to interpret the results from both statistical and pedagogical perspectives. The scientific novelty lies in the attempt to design phonetic instruction for a cognate-language environment not on the basis of “general difficulties,” but on the basis of interference profiles and individual differences in phonemic sensitivity. Its practical significance is seen in the proposal of clear stages, diagnostic tools, and feedback mechanisms that optimize lesson design.



In learners from cognate-language backgrounds, phonetic errors are often connected with the phenomenon of interference. In other words, the phonetic system of the learner's native language influences the sound system of Uzbek. For example, sounds that do not exist in some Turkic languages, or are pronounced differently in them, create difficulties in learning Uzbek. In particular, the correct pronunciation of sounds such as q, g', and ng is difficult for many learners. In addition, issues of stress and intonation require separate attention.

From this point of view, differentiated instruction proves to be an effective means of teaching phonetics. It makes it possible to organize lessons according to learners' current level of knowledge and specific needs. In this process, learners are usually divided into three main groups: high-, intermediate-, and low-level learners. A separate methodological approach and exercise system is developed for each group. Work with low-level learners focuses mainly on articulatory exercises. At this stage, activities include correct sound production, training of the speech organs, reading by syllables, and slow pronunciation practice. With intermediate-level learners, effective activities include distinguishing sounds, working with minimal pairs, identifying sounds by listening, and repetition exercises. For high-level learners, the emphasis is placed on speech development, tongue twisters, work with more complex texts, and the development of intonational skills.

The experimental design was quasi-experimental: within the same curriculum, two parallel groups were formed. In the experimental group, phonetics was taught on the basis of differentiated instruction, while in the control group it was taught through a traditional general methodology. The sample consisted of learners from cognate-language backgrounds whose native languages displayed dominant Turkic



phonological features. Through initial diagnostic assessment, the comparability of the groups was checked in terms of baseline phonemic awareness, pronunciation accuracy, and the rate of spelling errors. The differentiation criteria were established in four blocks. The first was the type of interference (the influence of vowel harmony, voiced-voiceless alternation, stress, and syllable structure). The second was sensitivity to distinguishing phonetic minimal pairs. The third was articulatory complexity (contrasts involving front vs. back tongue position, lip rounding, and stop vs. fricative distinctions). The fourth was speech rate and degree of automatization.

Diagnostic tasks were developed for each criterion, and based on the results, learners were taught in conditional subgroups. For example, for those who had difficulty hearing minimal pairs, listening discrimination was prioritized; for those with persistent articulatory errors, mirror-based articulation practice, slowed rhythm, and audio feedback were emphasized. The database consisted of three types of material: (1) pronunciation samples based on audio recordings, (2) test results and dictations reflecting spelling performance, and (3) classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. In the error corpus analysis, phonetic errors were classified into phonological errors (phoneme confusion), phonetic errors (allophonic deviation), prosodic errors (stress and rhythm), and orthographic errors (spelling errors based on phonetics). The quantitative analysis included pre-test and post-test differences, subgroup-level progress, and indicators demonstrating the pedagogical significance of the effect. The qualitative analysis explained the mechanisms of error stabilization and identified the conditions under which differentiated tasks were most effective. In selecting methodological solutions, modern approaches to second-



language phonetics and differentiated teaching—especially principles for developing phonemic perception and sequencing practice—served as the theoretical foundation.

At the end of the experiment, the experimental group showed stable improvement in overall pronunciation accuracy. Learners whose pre-test results had placed them in the low and medium range of standard pronunciation shifted into a higher range in the post-test. In particular, deviations related to the contrast between stops and fricatives, the opposition of voiced and voiceless consonants, and syllable structure decreased. In phonemic discrimination tests, the rate of correct identification of minimal pairs increased significantly. This growth was not identical across all subgroups, but the greatest progress was observed among learners initially identified as having low listening sensitivity, which indicates that differentiated listening training played a compensatory role. In spelling results, the proportion of errors caused by phonetic factors decreased. In some learners, orthographic stability strengthened after changes in pronunciation—that is, once articulatory norms became relatively automated. In others, however, written exercises and phonetic analysis, such as syllable segmentation, stress marking, and transcription-like notation, helped regulate pronunciation. Positive changes were also observed in the control group, but these were mostly limited to “easier” segments and the general effect of instruction, while stable interference-based errors—such as stress shift or neutralization of vowel quality—decreased more slowly.

The analysis of the error corpus in the experimental group revealed a shift from phonological errors to phonetic-allophonic deviations. In other words, learners preserved meaning-distinguishing features more successfully, even though accent-



related features had not completely disappeared. This result confirms the real objective of phonetics instruction: first to correct the phonemic system, and only then, step by step, to refine stylistic and orthoepic accuracy. Classroom observations showed that differentiated tasks moved learners from passive repetition to active self-monitoring. Re-listening to audio, mutual correction in pairs, and the teacher's short and precise articulatory instructions directed learners' attention toward a metalinguistic stance—"How am I pronouncing this?" In interviews, learners explained their difficulties mainly in terms of "confusing similar sounds" and "returning to old habits when speaking quickly." These two problems were precisely the target of the differentiated model's components for rhythm control and staged work with minimal pairs.

On the basis of this approach, it is possible to develop a staged methodological model for teaching phonetics. This model begins with identifying learners' phonetic level. At the next stage, learners are divided into differentiated groups, and an appropriate system of exercises is selected for each group. During the teaching process, continuous monitoring is carried out and learners' developmental dynamics are tracked. At the final stage, the achieved results are analyzed and evaluated.

The results of the experimental work clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of differentiated instruction. In particular, in the groups where this approach was applied, learners' pronunciation accuracy improved, phonetic errors decreased, and speech activity increased significantly. This confirms the importance of differentiated instruction not only in theory but also in practice. The scientific novelty of the differentiated exercise system and methodological model proposed in this study lies in the fact that it was developed with the phonetic characteristics of



cognate-language learners in mind. In addition, the effectiveness of a level-based approach in overcoming phonetic errors was proven experimentally.

In **conclusion** the differentiated instruction approach to teaching Uzbek phonetics in cognate-language classrooms has high effectiveness and contributes to the development of learners' speech competence by taking their individual characteristics into account. In the future, further improvement of this approach, its integration with digital technologies, and its broader implementation in practice will remain among the important tasks.

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